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HOMEMAERS' CHAT

Thursday, March 9, 1939.

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "MAN AND THE INSECT WORLD." Information from the Bureau of Entomology and Plant Quarantine, U. S. Department of Agriculture.

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"If you eat food, wear clothing, live in a house, and are not immune to malaria, yellow fever, spotted fever, and a number of other diseases, the Federal Bureau of Entomology and Plant Quarantine affects you very directly in many ways."

In a moment I'll give you some interesting points to prove this striking statement. It was made by Lee A. Strong, Chief of the bureau I mentioned. But first I'd like to tell you a little about the job this bureau in the U. S. Department of Agriculture is called on to do.

It is one of the busiest bureaus of the department, because every year insects destroy about 3 billion dollars' worth of crops, timber, fabrics, stored products, livestock, and buildings, and transmit many diseases and irritate mankind in various ways. Its scientists are called on to investigate methods for controlling these many different kinds of insect pests. They work in about 300 field offices and laboratories, under the general direction of the administrative offices in Washington.

Some of the scientists of this bureau are devising and testing new insecticides. Others are studying parasitic insects that may prove useful in combatting crop pests. Still others may be testing crop plants grown by plant scientists for resistance to certain insect pests. Again, there are investigations into farm practice. One method of cultivating the soil may prevent insect damage, another may encourage insect damage. The date of seeding or harvesting may influence the safety of the crop from some insect. The entomologist knows what to expect from his study of insect life cycles. Scientists also study methods of harvesting lumber to prevent the enormous damage done by bark beetles and other forest insects. A special group studies honeybees, which are important for their honey, their beeswax, and their ability to pollinate certain plants.

Are you still wondering how all this affects you as an individual? Here's how: Your house is comfortably warm, because no termites affect its tight construction. The foods on your table three times a day have practically all been protected from some insect pest through the work of entomologists. The apples you enjoy might have been damaged by the San José scale, the codling moth, or the plum curculio --- if entomologists hadn't devised methods of keeping these insects from the fruit. Entomologists stamped out the Mediterranean fruit fly when it threatened the Florida grapefruit orchards. Your breakfast cereal is free of weevils because of better warehouse practices recommended by the bureau. Eggs are produced in greater abundance, owing to investigations which resulted in the control of lice and mites on poultry. Perhaps the wheat in your toast came from an area in which the hessian fly is a serious pest. If so, that wheat was



protected from the Hessian fly by the entomologists' recommendations as to the safe date for planting the wheat. Meat animals- cattle, sheep and swine- have insect troubles of their own- but I'm sure I need not elaborate further on foods.

Now let's look at the clothes we wear. Sweaters, suits, overcoats- are made of wool. These woolen fabrics would be riddled by clothes moths in warm weather or warm houses, -were it not for the information housewives have received from entomologists on how to protect their woolens and furs. The cotton clothes we wear and the cotton textiles we use around the house- sheets, towels, curtains, and so on, - are abundant and relatively cheap. Entomologists pointed the way to the control of the boll weevil which threatened to destroy the cotton crops of the south. They are still concerned with keeping out the pink bollworm of cotton.

Entomologists have played an important part in the control of insect-borne diseases affecting both man and animals. You all have heard how malaria and yellow fever are carried by mosquitoes. Quite recently it was discovered that the American dog tick, which often carries the dangerous Rocky Mountain spotted fever, was abundant in the east. Again the entomologists were busy with recommendations for control.

Now to speak for a moment about the insects that give homemakers the most trouble: Clothes moths, cockroaches, flies, fleas, silverfish, bedbugs, carpet beetles, cereal beetles, and so on. You'll be glad to know that during the past year the Bureau of Entomology and Plant Quarantine has issued a series of brief leaflets on these household insects. So, if you are anxious to know how to eradicate any particular one, write to the Department of Agriculture for information, and you will receive printed instructions for dealing with that pest.

No picture of the work of the Bureau of Entomology and Plant Quarantine would be complete without mention of its regulatory work. Wherever ships come into our ports of entry, inspectors of the Plant Quarantine corps examine plant material to make sure of excluding insect pests and plant diseases. Parcels sent by mail from foreign countries must also be examined. Airplanes entering the country are checked for possible plant-pest-bearing material.

Along the Mexican border, shipments of fruits and vegetables are inspected and empty freight cars are fumigated, lest they harbor fruit flies, pink bollworm, or other pests. Travellers must have their baggage inspected. This work is constantly hampered by those who try to evade the laws against bringing certain products into this country. The work of the plant quarantine inspectors reminds one of the customs officials, but it goes farther, in that it keeps out of the United States every year thousands of potential trouble-makers. They are minute, but costly, enemies from the insect world.

All this adds up to the fact that the work of the Bureau of Entomology and Plant Quarantine affects you, directly, as an individual, touching the food you eat, the clothes you wear, the house you live in, and even your health.

